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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
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INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001262

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/SPG, SE NATSIOS,

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL UN KPAQ UN SU

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. FLOOD RELIEF PRESS CONFERENCE

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. On August 8, the AmEmbassy held a press conference highlighting the U.S. contribution to Sudanese flood relief. The USG airlifted 1300 rolls of plastic sheeting valued at over one-half million U.S. dollars that will help provide shelter to 78,000 individuals in flood-affected areas of northern and eastern Sudan. Following this press conference, there was a broad positive response in the Sudanese press. Nonetheless, one journalist in the pro-government "Akhbar Al-Youm," published a scathing commentary which blames the U.S. for flooding, calls upon the Sudanese government to return the donation, and states that the "U.S. is hostile to the third world." END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On August 9, the English language daily newspapers the "Khartoum Monitor," "The Citizen," and "Sudan Vision" reprinted the unedited version of the embassy's press release. The "Khartoum Monitor" included an original photo of the event. (NOTE: The text of the press release is attached at para 9. END NOTE.)

¶3. (U) Also on August 9, the independent Arabic daily, "Al-Soudani," featured two articles on the press conference. One article with the simple headline "The Charge' d'Affaires," begins with the CDA's response to a question on the hybrid force, and only later describes the original purpose of the press conference. According to the article, the CDA responded to a question about Sudan's anxiety over funding of the hybrid, saying, "We respect this anxiety, but the international community is committed to funding this force to achieve stability and peace in the region." The article states that the CDA said, "We, from our side, we want to see tangible progress and a new page for the future." The article then enters into the details of the flood relief effort, largely quoting from the press release. In a disconnected fashion, the article ends by quoting a separate press release from the United Nations on the composition of the hybrid.

¶4. (U) The other article in "Al-Soudani" focused only on the CDA's statements after the press conference on UNSC resolution 1769, the Arusha conference attended by Darfur rebels, and the alleged denial of visas to Sudanese parliamentarians who wished to visit Sudanese nationals currently detained in Guantanamo Bay. This article, entitled "The Charge' d'Affaires rejects receiving the request for visas from the parliamentarians," did not mention the flood relief press conference at which these statements were made. According to the article, the CDA called upon Darfur rebel groups to join the upcoming negotiations with the Sudanese government. The article also reports that the CDA said that "Time is short and it is necessary for the rebel movements to participate in the meetings."

¶5. (U) The pro-government, "Al-Rai' Al-Aam" also carried the story on the press conference on August 9 with the headline "The American Embassy denies rejecting the parliamentarians' visas." The article briefly mentions the CDA's complete denial of the visa story, and then provides details of the flood relief efforts.

¶6. (U) In contrast to this positive press, in an article in the

pro-government, "Akhbar Al-Youm" on August 11, the head of the Sudanese Journalists' Union, Muhie Aldin Titaw, called for the Government of Sudan to reject the flood relief donation from the U.S. In his regular column entitled "Stances," Titaw writes, "we say that that we are not in need of relief from this American administration which is very hostile to us." Continuing, he says, "[This administration] is the first and last cause for all of the suffering of the Sudanese people and their political, economic and security dilemmas. America, and not the American people, is the main reason for this global warming that has drowned the third world and part of Europe with rains and floods." Titaw then writes that America is responsible for the misery of the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America "because of its idiotic intervention in the affairs of the whole world." He then praises Sudanese civilization, its natural resources, and its technological potential, concluding that "we should not accept any assistance or relief from America or its allies that are conspiring against us and against our security and stability."

¶ 7. (U) Titaw continues to rail against American foreign policy led by, as he strangely notes, a "fanatical and extremist Catholic administration against Islam and Muslims that wants to annihilate the Muslims wherever they are." He then writes, "We would like to say to the American Charge' d'Affaires, Mr. Alberto Fernandez-who is now conducting a public affairs campaign to the benefit of his country- that we cannot be deceived with his expressions of courtesy or by sending some decadent food under the guise of relief for the ill-fated." He then returns to praising the virtue of the Sudanese people, and ends his piece calling upon the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs to return the flood relief donation, and send back to the U.S. a Sudanese donation to the people of New Orleans and Louisiana and all the victims of Katrina "who are still waiting for relief and support to return to their normal lives."

¶ 8. (U) COMMENT: Although many of the articles prominently featured

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the CDA's remarks on the parliamentarian visa issue, they conveniently did not include his admonition for the Sudanese press to confirm their facts and raise their professional standards. Second, many of the Arabic dailies also addressed the flood relief in passing, featuring controversial issues such as the parliamentarians' visas or the CDA's comments on the Darfur. Nonetheless, even these articles enabled the U.S. to correct misinformation, put forth official policy, and, at the end of such articles, commemorate the U.S. contribution to flood relief. Finally, it may be easy to dismiss Titaw's scathing commentary because of its bizarre allegations which blame the U.S. for global flooding or state that the U.S. is led by an extremist Catholic administration. Nonetheless, Titaw's position as the head of the Sudanese Journalists' Association and his connection to regime insiders, may give his vitriolic message added weight. END COMMENT.

PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY U.S. EMBASSY IN KHARTOUM

¶ 9. (U) Begin text:

The United States Delivers Flood Relief to the People of Sudan -Materials to be distributed through the "Common Pipeline"-

KHARTOUM, SUDAN - The United States Government today airlifted 1300 rolls of plastic sheeting that will help provide shelter for 78,000 individuals in the flood-affected areas of northern and eastern Sudan. The material is valued at over one-half million U.S. dollars.

U.S. Charg d'Affaires Alberto M. Fernandez requested the U.S. assistance saying, "The U.S. Government is pleased to provide additional shelter materials to those who have lost their homes and livelihoods in the recent flooding. The U.S. continues to be committed to providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to the people of Sudan."

The Undersecretary for the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr.

Charles Manyang, accepted the material on behalf of the Government of Sudan, and expressed his gratitude to the U.S. and its partners.

This plastic sheeting will be distributed via the Common Humanitarian Pipeline, a quick-response distribution network established in 2004 and managed by the U.N. Joint Logistics Centre with support from UNICEF and the non-governmental organization CARE International. This distribution mechanism, largely supported by the USG to quickly respond to non-food item needs throughout Sudan, has played a vital role in ensuring that lifesaving materials, like plastic sheeting, cooking sets, and mosquito nets, arrive rapidly to flood-affected areas. The Common Pipeline has already rushed material to nine affected states in the north of Sudan, benefiting more than 200,000 people.

Speaking on behalf of the Common Pipeline partners, UNICEF Representative Ted Chaiban recognized the importance of effective collaboration, saying "In emergencies, it is critical that there is a speedy and appropriate response to meet immediate needs. This is being achieved in Sudan's flood-affected regions, because the Government, the international community, the UN and the non-governmental organizations have worked together. We remain committed to this spirit of partnership, to better serve those affected by this emergency."

The U.S. is the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Sudan and Darfur. The U.S. has contributed more than \$2.6 billion for humanitarian, development, and reconstruction projects in Sudan and eastern Chad in FY 2005 and FY 2006, and has provided more than half of all humanitarian assistance to Sudan. Through humanitarian programs the U.S. provides shelter, food, water and sanitation, health and hygiene, relief supplies and income-generation funds for those in need. For more information about the United State's emergency humanitarian assistance programs in Sudan, please visit www.usaid.gov/sudan. For more information on UNICEF's activities in Sudan, please visit www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sudan.html.

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